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A VINDICATION  
OF  
CLASSICAL STUDIES.

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*E. A. Duyckinck Esq.*

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VINDICATION

OF

CLASSICAL STUDIES.

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BY CHARLES H. LYON, A. M.

ONE OF THE PRINCIPALS OF THE IRVING INSTITUTE.

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TO

**WILLIAM A. DUER, LL. D.,**

**PRESIDENT OF COLUMBIA COLLEGE,**

***This humble Tribute***

**IS SINCERELY INSCRIBED,**

**BY ONE**

**WHO CHERISHES A GRATEFUL RECOLLECTION OF HIS  
COURTESY AND KINDNESS.**



## P R E F A C E.

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The present Treatise comprises selections from a number of articles written by the author a few years since, for a quarterly periodical, together with the substance of a lecture delivered in the Irving Institute, and subsequently printed in a pamphlet form.

No man of tolerable observation can fail to have perceived the extreme utilitarian tendency of the age, and the increasing indifference to the higher order of intellectual culture. It is therefore scarcely necessary to offer any apology for an essay like the present; for however great the number, or excellent the quality of similar productions—however much has been said and written on the subject, yet, so long as the opposition to classical learning continues unabated, the reason for defending it exists, and it would be strange indeed if the professed friends of that learning, and those actively engaged in its promulgation “should be deterred from asserting its just claims by the apprehension of dwelling on a hackneyed topic.”

It is the strong conviction of the author, that the study of antiquity is intimately connected with sound learning, and that it is impossible for the latter to flourish where the former is regarded with indifference. So important therefore does he deem the influence of that study upon the state of education, and, consequently, upon the best interests of society, that while its vindication is worthy of the most gifted minds, yet any effort in its behalf, however humble, is entitled to a favorable reception.

C. H. L.

IRVING INSTITUTE, DEC. 10, 1840.

A VINDICATION  
OF  
CLASSICAL STUDIES.

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It has been remarked that the stream of knowledge flows wider in the United States than elsewhere, but not as deep; and in comparing the state of education amongst us with its condition in other enlightened countries, we are struck with the truth of the observation. We have certainly more of the means for disseminating information, greater facilities for the propagation of popular knowledge, than any nation on the globe; and our citizens are, in consequence, unequalled for general intelligence. But with this truth is connected the humiliating fact that our systems of learning are more superficial: that learning amongst us is less sound, and scholarship less thorough than in most of the enlightened nations of Europe.

That this is especially true in regard to classical literature—that there exists a deep-seated and grow-

ing prejudice against the study of that literature—that it is considered by many an unnecessary element in the education of youth, and by some as even positively injurious in its tendency, are facts too obvious, and confirmed by too many indications, to require any illustration. We are by no means to infer, however, that such facts are in themselves evidence of the little importance due to those studies. This would be to prejudge the question. It has been well observed in another country, and is still more true in our own, that “the only melancholy manifestation in the opposition now raised to the established course of classical instruction is not the fact of such opposition, but that arguments in themselves so futile should not have been wholly harmless. If such attacks have had their influence on the public mind, this affords only another proof; not that ancient literature is with us studied too much, but that it is studied far too little.”\*

If we trace to its source this hostility to ancient literature, it will be found to be, in many instances, a constitutional infirmity. There are certain descriptions of character in which it is in-

\* Edinburg Rev., No. 129, Art. 6.

herent, and from which it can not be eradicated. The peculiarity of constitution which, more than any other, gives birth to it, consists in that unequal combination, and one-sided development of the faculties in which the *active* predominate over the *contemplative*. Where this condition exists independently of education, it is a necessary cause of partiality for the practical pursuits, and of aversion to the intellectual. The reverse of this, which also sometimes occurs, gives rise to the opposite extreme—a preference for literary avocations, and a distaste for the active pursuits. Though both extremes are but the proofs of an imperfectly formed mind, (and therefore to be deplored,) yet the former exists more extensively than the latter, and is far more injurious in its tendency.

It was this disproportion in the combination and evolution of the faculties, that in the first instance gave rise to the question of the respective merits of the active and speculative pursuits; and we find the same principle discussed in different forms, and under different names, from the earliest period of intellectual culture down to our own day.

Another trait of character which accounts for some portion of the prejudice against classical



learning consists in that disposition which renders some men unhappy when they see others enjoying a benefit or blessing of which they are themselves destitute. Those who have never made any advancement in the higher walks of literature, can often find in that fact alone sufficient reason for depreciating its advantages, and decrying it to others. They are grieved at the thought of being without the benefits which such studies confer, and seek to mitigate their grief by underrating those benefits. "It is natural," says a judicious writer, "that men should be inclined to soothe their vanity with the belief, that what they do not themselves know, is not worth knowing; and that they should find it easy to convert others, who are equally ignorant, to the same opinion, is what might also confidently be presumed." Still the opposition of such persons is of but little account. The cause of classical studies will never experience serious injury from a hostility which is the mere offspring of envy. Men who oppose a branch of learning in which they are not versed, who are spurred to opposition by a sense of their own deficiency, and who reason, (so far as they resort to argument at all,) against their own convictions, need not expect to accomplish much.

There is, however, a more numerous class of persons whose want of knowledge or want of capacity renders them incapable of appreciating these pursuits, and who oppose them, not from a secret conviction of their importance, and a sense of their own destitution, but from a natural proneness to condemn what they do not, or can not, comprehend. It has been truly remarked, that "the higher and more peculiar the ultimate advantages and pleasures of these studies—the more they educate to capacities of thought and feeling which we should never otherwise have been taught to know or exert, and the more that what it accomplishes can be accomplished by it alone—the less can those who have had no experience of its benefits, ever conceive, far less estimate their importance." That the inability of such persons to appreciate classical literature should be the cause of their condemning it, is natural enough. Men who are prevented by lack of inclination, or of intellect, from forming their own judgment upon a controverted question, and who only have opinions as they derive them from the dictum of another, are commonly the most ambitious to appear as partizans, the most zealous in parading their sentiments, and the most tenacious

in adhering to them. Those who are too stupid to do their own thinking, are ever the most dogmatical in maintaining a point, and the last to yield it. Possessing no resources in themselves—without the requisite qualifications for arriving at an independent conclusion, they are compelled to draw from extraneous sources. Their articles of faith are taken at second hand, and when they have once come into possession of an opinion, they will cut off a right hand, or pluck out a right eye, sooner than part with it. Such persons usually adopt the sentiments of those whose aim and interests are most nearly allied to their own, and whose capacities and modes of thinking, though indeed of a higher order than theirs, are similar in kind. They take their cue from some kindred spirit who happens to be endowed with more brains than themselves, but who rarely excels them in dogged conceit or obtrusive insolence. When the gravest questions are discussed—questions on which they, in common modesty, ought to remain silent—they are usually the first to decide upon the merits. Arrayed in the garb of borrowed opinions, they start into new importance, and claim to be wiser than those who can render a reason. They make

up in zeal what they lack in persuasion ; assurance is the cloak of ignorance, and clamor supplies the place of argument.

The opposition of this class of persons to the encouragement of ancient learning, so far as sustained by reason or argument, amounts exactly to nothing. And their influence might be set down at zero, except for their numbers ;—their name is legion—they make up in multitude what they want in rationality ; they swell the ranks to which they join themselves, and give *popularity* to the cause they espouse, —and that, in these days, is more than half the victory.

But in addition to these *original* and *inherent* sources of hostility to classical literature, there are others of a local character, which, though more limited in extent, are no less intense in their operation. Of those peculiar to this country, perhaps the most important is the influence of our political system. A slight consideration of the tendency and practical operation of our government, will show how little benefit and how much injury the cause of good literature derives from that quarter.

The very simplicity of our institutions, which is justly regarded as one of their highest recommen-

dations, is prejudicial to the cause of letters, by enabling men of inferior attainments to administer the government. Not only is the knowledge of the ancient classics deemed a needless qualification for office, but even those branches of an English education which have no necessary connexion with public duties are held, for the most part, equally superfluous. If the character of the government were such as to require well educated men to discharge its offices, this would prove the high sense entertained by the nation of the importance of liberal studies. It would stamp them, as it were, with the national estimate of their value, and would operate as a public premium upon good literature. If there were a single official station such, that of two candidates, the one being a scholar, and the other a comparatively unlettered man, the former would, *ceteris paribus*, be most likely to succeed—such a fact would do much for the cause of liberal studies. The want of some palpable evidence of the political importance of these pursuits is, in this country, easily converted into an argument against them. Qualification for office is too apt to be regarded as necessarily including a fitness for all the duties and relations of life. And hence, whatever

is not found to be indispensable to the *magistrate*, is held to be equally unnecessary for the *man*.

Another, and perhaps greater evil tendency in our institutions, is one that arises from their most democratic feature. The fact that the offices of the government, from the highest to the lowest, are accessible alike to all the citizens, lays the foundation for a widely-extended aspiration after political distinction. The spirit thus propagated is extremely inimical to literature and education. The contest for principles, the zeal for party, the desire for promotion, are all too intense and absorbing to admit of either leisure or inclination for literary pursuits; and these are the more neglected in proportion as they are considered unnecessary for political or party purposes. Those whose impulses lead them into the arena of public life, (and they are a numerous class,) knowing that a wide range of liberal studies, of varied and extensive acquirements, and in particular, that an acquaintance with the ancient classics, is not a condition of success in their intended sphere of action, are too apt to overlook them. The stir and bustle of popular assemblies, the excitement of party warfare, and the thrilling applause of the multitude, possess more charms for

such persons than the quiet pursuits of science and literature. They are unwilling to encounter the labor of acquiring what they do not consider essential to the end which they propose to themselves. Believing that practical qualifications are the most essential and almost exclusive requisites for the attainment of their object, they neglect to lay the surest foundation for usefulness and distinction—a liberal and thorough education.

Again, it may be observed that the direct patronage in behalf of the higher departments of learning, which characterizes the governments of most enlightened countries, is almost entirely wanting in our own. The state legislatures have, many of them, made liberal provisions in favor of common school education; and the benefits resulting to the people at large from such legislation can scarcely be overrated. But while the diffusion of elementary learning has been viewed by most of our statesmen in the light of its true importance, the interests of the higher literature have been almost wholly overlooked. How few and unimportant are the positive enactments for the protection or encouragement of liberal learning which our statute-books record! How few of our literary institutions

have been either founded, sustained, or encouraged by government appropriations !

There is another pervading influence at work in this country, which seriously affects not only the interests of literature and science, but the national morals in an equal degree. We allude to the money-making spirit. The physical resources of the country, the facilities for production and commerce, in proportion as they render easy the acquisition of wealth, and place it within the reach of the mass, give extension and intensity to the spirit of accumulation. The consequence is, that devotion to the pursuit of gain is now regarded as the pre-eminent characteristic of our nation. The whole country seems engaged in one pursuit—aiming at one end—*affluence*. The all-absorbing question is how to acquire the greatest amount of wealth in the shortest space of time. This inquiry is pursued with intense enthusiasm, and to the exclusion of nearly every thing besides. It engrosses the attention of all classes, ages, and conditions. The powers of genius are taxed, time and labor are contributed without grudging, and no sacrifice is spared that will forward the one great end.

“The desire of acquisition is excessive. It is



restless, insatiable, boundless ; unhallowed and unredeemed by better influences, by a superior and pervading respect and love for higher and nobler objects. For along with this increase of wealth has come a prodigious growth of luxury ; an infinite multiplication of the means and refinements of physical enjoyment ; and we are hurrying on with prodigious strides to a state of excessive civilization without due cultivation ; of luxurious indulgence and the refinements of pleasure without a proportionate growth of intellectual and moral culture, without a lively and respectful regard for the less material and less vulgar interests of life.”\*

It is earnestly to be regretted that either the pursuit of wealth or the desire of political preferment should be so eager and absorbing as to arrest the progress of sound learning, or seriously to check the literary spirit of the nation.

But the cause which has, perhaps more than any other, depressed the standard of classical erudition among us, is the slight and imperfect mode of teaching, and the immature age at which boys enter upon the higher departments of learning. The

\* Discourse of Prof. Henry before the Phi Sigma Nu Society of the University of Vermont.

manner in which classical education is almost universally conducted in this country is superficial in the extreme; and the early period of life at which our youth enter upon it, renders it impossible that their progress should be otherwise than slow and unsatisfactory. A longer time is thus occupied in the attainment of a liberal education than would otherwise be required, and the pupil experiences but few of the numerous advantages that would assuredly be derived from it if it were pursued at a riper age, and in a more thorough manner.

The remarks of a distinguished scholar of this country, in reference to the present mode of teaching the ancient languages, are forcible and true. "If there be any one cause," he observes, "which has tended more powerfully than the rest to bring classical studies into disrepute among us, it is the utter incompetency of many of those who profess to be classical instructors." "We may be very sure," he again remarks, "of one thing, that the style of classical instruction which prevails at the present day in so many of our colleges and seminaries of learning, of translating merely the language of an ancient author, without any attempt whatever at illustration or analysis, will never pro-

duce any fruits either of sound learning or intellectual improvement.”\* The prevailing style of teaching the ancient languages is here fitly characterized. Pupils are confined almost entirely to the translation of the mere language of the ancient writers, and even this is commonly done in so loose and inaccurate a manner, as to give the student but little idea of the philosophy and structure of language, and but a faint impression of the sentiment and spirit of his author. Under such circumstances it is impossible he should see the beauties of the literature through which he is blindly groping, or acquire a relish for that which, however delightful in itself, is rendered to him a disagreeable task.

That such habits of teaching and learning should bring these studies into disrepute is by no means surprising; and the same causes are found to produce similar results in the other departments of learning. Where the teaching is not thorough the scholarship cannot be sound. If the foundation be unsubstantial, what can we expect of the superstructure? While education is made to consist of a certain routine of study which is neither pre-

\* Prof. Anthon..

scribed with judgment nor pursued with vigor, it is not surprising that so many among us who profess to be liberally educated, who have spent the requisite time among books and in halls of science, and who can produce a scroll of parchment to attest their literary attainments, prove, after all, to be mere pretenders to learning, and are found sadly deficient in the very rudiments of knowledge.

If boys were properly taught in the first stages of their classical education; if they were required to gain an insight into grammatical principles before entering upon a course of reading; if they were taught to estimate their attainments by the *manner* of their recitations rather than by the *number of pages gone over*; and if teachers would inculcate the habit of learning accurately and understandingly, and would accompany their instruction with analysis and illustration, students would much sooner be able to perceive the advantages of liberal studies and the beauties of the higher literature, and would acquire a fondness for pursuits which they now too often regard with aversion. We should then have something like sound scholarship in this, as in other departments of knowledge, and should less frequently witness the

mortifying spectacle of students entering college with very imperfect preparation, and leaving it without sufficient learning to translate their diplomas.

THE considerations favorable to the study of the Greek and Latin tongues, will be found upon reflection more numerous and weighty than a slight view would lead us to suppose. For the sake of clearness and brevity, I shall consider them under two heads :

I. The advantages *necessarily* resulting from the study of these languages.

II. The treasures of knowledge laid open by an acquaintance with them.

I. The benefits which the student derives, *as a matter of course*, from these pursuits, are neither few nor unimportant. Yet being of a more latent kind, they are the less perceived, and therefore fail to be appreciated as they deserve.

1. In the first place, he acquires, while learning the mere words of the ancient tongues, a fund of knowledge applicable to a variety of purposes, and

in some pursuits essentially important. It is true that words are but the signs of ideas, and that when dissociated from these they are destitute both of meaning and of value. But it is not in this abstract view that they are made the object of study. The utility and importance of a thorough and extensive acquaintance with them in every department of knowledge are too obvious to need illustration, and the student of antiquity derives unquestionable benefit from such an accession to his learning. His familiarity with the etymology of the dead language renders more extensive and accurate his knowledge of the words of his own tongue. The great number of Latin and Greek roots which enter into the composition of the latter, makes it an object of no slight importance, even to the mere English scholar, to make himself acquainted with them. It is, indeed, the surest, if not the only way, for the inheritor of the English tongue entirely to master his vernacular. There are in our language a multitude of words with which a thorough acquaintance can only be obtained by tracing them to their sources in the Latin and Greek. He, therefore, who would be well grounded even in his household dialect, will accomplish that object most

effectually by studying the etymology of antiquity. But besides this most obvious advantage, the youthful scholar, while studying the ancient vocabularies, is laying the foundation for the easy acquisition of all the languages derived from them. He who desires to learn the modern tongues, if he engage in the pursuit of them with the advantage of a previous acquaintance with classical literature, will realize the utility of the latter, when he finds his progress through the languages of modern Europe greatly assisted, and the time and labor he would have to expend in learning them materially diminished.

Again: the utility of a critical knowledge of radical words, and of the derivatives formed from them, is clearly exhibited in the study of *Linguistic* or *Comparative Philology*—a science which has done much to explode “those absurd opinions relative to the origin and classification of communities which are now slowly passing away from the world of letters, and are giving place to a more rational and legitimate spirit of research.” In tracing the origin and settlement of nations, an acquaintance with the roots of the ancient languages is indispensable. It is an auxiliary for which there is

no substitute. The aid of history can scarcely be brought to the investigation of a people's rise and progress at a period which is itself anterior to the earliest historic record. It is only by cautiously and patiently comparing the words which compose their respective languages, that we are enabled, in the absence of historical evidence, to arrive at any degree of certainty respecting the localities, migrations, and affinities of the primitive races of mankind. "Elevated to the rank of a science," says Professor Anthon, in an able disquisition on the study of Linguistic, "she proceeds to solve all problems relative to language on the surest and most philosophical principles. Does a philologist of this school wish to determine whether any affinity exists between two races or nations? He examines the vocabulary of each, and if he find that such terms as express the more immediate ties of relationship, the principal parts of the human frame, the heavenly bodies, the leading phenomena of nature, and the primary numbers, are either identical in their roots, or very nearly so, he concludes that these two nations sprang undoubtedly from one common source. It makes no matter how far they may be separated from each other by geographical position.



Chance may produce a coincidence in three or four expressions, but never in three or four hundred.”\* In like manner he traces an identity or strong resemblance in the terms which have reference to the arts of government, war, or husbandry of different nations, and infers from such resemblance an international intercourse or a community of origin. Thus the science of comparative philology renders a most important service to the study of history by supplying chasms in the latter, and enabling us to carry back our inquiries to a period more remote than even the earliest mythic accounts. Surely a branch of study so intimately connected with philology as classical literature, and shedding light upon the history of the darkest periods, is deserving of the most careful attention.

There is another advantage arising from an acquaintance with the mere *words* of the Latin and Greek, which ought not to be overlooked. The scholar is rendered at once familiar with the nomenclature of science, and with the technology of the legal and medical professions. “The very language of science,” says Professor Moore, “is de-

\* See New-York Review, Vol. I, p. 113.

rived from Greece and Rome ; and the zoologist, the botanist, the mineralist, the chymist, and others will bear witness to the necessity of some acquaintance with the ancient tongues to a clear understanding even of the terms of art." Languages which possess qualities that have caused them to be incorporated into the different branches of science, or extensively used in professional practice, ought not indeed to be proscribed as useless and unprofitable.

2. The thorough knowledge of GRAMMATICAL PRINCIPLES, which is inseparably connected with the study of the ancient classics, forms no slight argument in their favor. The easy simplicity of the one, and the philosophical structure of the other of these languages, as well as the peculiar idioms of both, render them the most effectual, and, in the opinion of some, the only medium for the attainment of this object. By studying their inflexions and construction, the mind of the scholar is led to a more perfect understanding of the principles of his own tongue, and to a fuller comprehension of the philosophy of language, than he could by any other means attain to. When he has once mastered the principles of *universal grammar*, he has laid the foundation of the easy attain-

ment of most other languages. The value of this acquisition, and the utility of the classics as auxiliary to it, we presume that none will deny. The intimate connexion between the philosophy of language and the philosophy of mind, stamps upon the former a degree of importance which no enlightened mind can fail to appreciate.

3. Again : the scholar, in his progress through a course of classical studies, acquires necessarily a vast store of KNOWLEDGE WHICH HE WOULD NOT OTHERWISE POSSESS. He imbues his mind with a more thorough and intimate acquaintance with the history of antiquity than he could possibly obtain from any modern writer, or from the most learned and correct translation. He learns the manners and customs, the laws, religion, opinions, arts and sciences of the ancients, with a degree of minuteness and accuracy to which the mere English scholar never attains, but which is yet essential to the profitable reading and right understanding of the history of those times. Without such auxiliary knowledge to illustrate it, what is the value of history? It is this collateral information which renders it intelligible, and makes it useful. Without this its character would be entirely changed, and its most

important end defeated. "The student," says Dr. Moore, "spends much time in learning words, no doubt; but he can not learn the signs without at the same time gaining some acquaintance with the things signified. Does he not learn the history, geography, and chronology of the ancient world; the civil, military, and religious institutions, the private life, manners and customs of the most interesting nations of the earth, as also the wisest systems of philosophy and morals, that unassisted human reason has been able to invent? Does he not become acquainted with the most sublime and beautiful monuments of human wit and genius? And is it possible that all this should be unattended with most sensible advantage?" Indeed, the advantage thus resulting to the youthful scholar is too obvious to be questioned, and too important to be disregarded. They who underrate the knowledge thus gleaned in the pursuit of classical literature, and affect to consider it superfluous, might urge the same objection, with equal plausibility, against every kind and degree of knowledge that do not immediately become a source of lucre.

4. Another advantage resulting from the pursuit of ancient letters is the CULTIVATION OF A CLASSIC

**TASTE AND A GRACEFUL STYLE.** A lively sensibility to the beauties of literature, and the power of discriminating between the truly elegant and the meretricious, have ever been justly regarded as a most valuable accomplishment. That these will necessarily follow from the perusal of the ancient writers, I am far from asserting. The manner in which those writers are too commonly studied, is but little calculated to effect such an object. Nor, indeed, is there any process by which the ability to perceive and admire what is beautiful in literature, can be imparted to those who were not made for such perception. But that the study of the Grecian and Roman masters, if pursued as it ought to be, contributes most essentially to the improvement of taste and style, is attested by all experience. The mere learning a system of rules, or committing to memory a treatise upon rhetoric, is by no means sufficient to make a speaker or writer. It is from the frequent and careful perusal of standard authors that the greatest improvement is to be derived. Both the structure of the ancient languages, and the attention paid by the writers of antiquity to the beauties of style and the graces of composition, render their productions the most perfect models.

5. But the chief excellence of the study which I am advocating, and that which gives it its highest value to man as a rational being, consists in its INFLUENCE ON THE MENTAL CHARACTER. It is a most important medium of intellectual training—that training “in which the individual is cultivated, not as an instrument towards some ulterior end, but as an end unto himself alone; in other words, in which his absolute perfection as a man, not his relative dexterity as a professional man, is the scope immediately in view.”

All the uses and benefits of study may be summed up under two heads, viz: the *forming* and the *furnishing* of the mind. Every branch of knowledge to which the scholar applies himself produces its designed result, either by giving scope for the exercise of his intellectual powers, and thus invigorating the mind, or by supplying the memory with facts, which constitute the nutriment of the mind, or else in both these ways combined.

But the mere acquisition of facts, unconnected with the proper exercise of the judgment, is seldom productive of real benefit, and liable to be attended with positive injury. It is true that a knowledge of facts is an indispensable element of intellectual

culture; but their value entirely depends upon the manner, and amount in which they are received. If they accumulate too rapidly, they clog the intellect, so to speak, and retard its operations. If, while the memory is treasuring them up, the understanding be not vigorously employed in arranging and classifying them, in comparing them together, and determining their relative importance, the mind will be oppressed and distorted, instead of strengthened and developed. The chief aim of education—that which is admitted to be its most important object—is the harmonious evolution of the faculties. In this lies the perfection of our nature. Every branch of study, therefore, which contributes to this end, possesses an intrinsic importance, which entitles it to the highest consideration; while, on the other hand, the advantage of those studies which lack this quality may, for that reason alone, be justly suspected.

That the study of the ancient classics contributes most essentially to the full and equal development of the intellectual powers, is proved by long experience, and attested by all who are competent to judge. The study of language in general, and of the Greek and Roman tongues in particular, (for from these

the *philosophy* of language is most effectually learned,) is one of the most useful exercises of the understanding, and eminently calculated to impart vigor and acuteness to the faculties. This is the opinion alike of scholars, critics, statesmen, and philosophers; and he must have unbounded confidence in his own pretensions who presumes, in the face of such authority, to disparage these pursuits, or deny their utility.

The opinion of so celebrated a critic and scholar as Madame De Stael, on this point, deserves to be quoted. In comparing the effects of classical studies with those of mathematical, she observes, "The study of languages, which in Germany constitutes the basis of education, is much more favorable to the evolution of the faculties, in the earlier age, than that of mathematics or of the physical sciences.  
\* \* \* \* \* There is, no doubt, a point at which the mathematics themselves require that luminous power of invention, without which it is impossible to penetrate into the secrets of nature. At the summit of thought the imaginations of Homer and of Newton seem to unite; but how many of the young, without mathematical genius, consecrate their time to this science! There is exercised in them only a



*single faculty*, while *the whole moral being* ought to be under development, at an age when it is so easy to derange the soul and the body in attempting to strengthen only a part."

Von Weiller, a distinguished German philosopher, and President of the Royal Institute of Studies in Munich, also bears decided testimony to the superiority of classical pursuits over mathematical. "Mathematics and Grammar," he remarks, "differ essentially from each other in respect to their efficiency as general means of intellectual cultivation. The former have to do only with the intuitions of space and time, and are, therefore, even in their foundation, limited to a special department of our being; whereas, the latter, occupied with the primary notions of our intellectual life in general, is co-extensive with its universal empire. On this account the grammatical exercise of mind must, if beneficially applied, precede the mathematical. And thus are we to explain why the efficiency of the latter does not stretch so widely over our intellectual territory; why it never develops the mind on so many sides; and why, also, it never penetrates so profoundly."

When we consider that to these authorities may

be added the names of Leibnitz, of Newton, of Milton, of Pitt, and a host of others no less distinguished for genius and learning, it is not a little surprising, that men of immeasurably inferior capacities and humbler attainments should be so forward to gainsay these pursuits, and decry their importance; and, especially, that men who neither understand, nor can appreciate them, should join in the proscription! Surely the cause of classical literature and liberal learning, rests on too secure a foundation to be seriously affected by such an opposition. Its own intrinsic merit is sufficient to sustain it; and while it has, in addition, the concurrent testimony of the wisest and greatest men in its favor, it can not suffer much from the fact, that some persons either can not, or will not, perceive its advantages.

II. I come now to the second head: The treasures of knowledge laid open by an acquaintance with the ancient classics.

It is impossible to survey the field of ancient literature in its length, and breadth, and beauty, and to contemplate the character of its intellectual vegetation, without a strong sense of admiration, and a strong conviction that its claims on our re-

gard are not over-rated even by its most ardent votaries. "For all that belongs to original genius, to spirited, masterly, and high execution," says Dr. Blair, "our best and most happy ideas are, generally speaking, drawn from the ancients."

The history of literature and science, is but the record of the progress of the human mind in the attainment of knowledge. In ancient times, while the mental powers were not yet developed, and the state of knowledge was rude, the minds of men were exercised in a different way in literary and scientific pursuits from that in which they now are, and in a manner more favorable to the development of genius. Few discoveries, comparatively, had then been made, and but little aid could be derived in the pursuit of one branch of knowledge from the advances made in another. Those principles of science that are now applied in the trades and arts, and in the ordinary business of life, had not yet been developed. There was, therefore, a greater demand for investigation and research, as the progress of the arts depended on the advancement of science. Men had to proceed by slow gradations, to arrive at one result before they could employ it in obtaining others, and to make one dis-

covery the stepping-stone to more. They were required to bring their powers more to a focus, to direct them to single objects, and this is, in fact, the secret of success in all mental operations. Hence there is more originality and inventive genius in the productions of antiquity than in those of our own time; and the writers of real merit among the ancients, bore a far higher ratio to the whole number than they do at the present day.

Yet, valuable and important as those productions are, they are comparatively inaccessible to a vast majority of the reading community of the present age. The poetry, the philosophy, the history, and the eloquence of the ancient world, are treasured up in the languages of Greece and Rome. The accumulated wisdom of ages, the productions of the human mind for successive centuries, are locked up for ever in those tongues. I say locked up for ever, for I believe it impossible to translate the *mind* of a writer into a foreign language. Works of genius are, by an irrevocable necessity, sealed up in the vernacular tongue of their authors. He who would commune with the spirits of antiquity, must master the language in which they *thought*.

But let us inquire in what particular departments

of knowledge we may derive pleasure and instruction from the writings of the ancients.

1. In respect to *physical science*, it can not indeed be denied that the moderns, who, in the very outset of their inquiries, could avail themselves of all the ancients knew, have, by that advantage, been able to make greater advances, and to obtain more numerous and important results than the latter. But it should not be forgotten to what extent modern science, in its infancy, was dependent on that literature which some of its votaries now scruple not to decry. It has been justly remarked, that "the fate of science is inseparable from that of letters; which, as they gave it birth, so do they continue to afford it nourishment." And it is found that even at this day the works of ancient naturalists are far from being destitute of interest and of value to scientific men. "The Greeks," says Professor Moore, "were acute observers; and when they conducted their inquiries in the true method of experiment, their writings, even on subjects of natural science, still maintain the highest value."

2. In *Grammar, Rhetoric, and Philology*, in all that relates to the philosophy of language, the

ancient critics were unsurpassed in profound, original, and, in general, accurate views. To this branch of science, indeed, more attention was paid among the ancients, and greater proficiency appears to have been made in it than at any subsequent period. The study of language was cultivated with the utmost care in the earliest days of literature and science, while it has declined among the moderns, and been suffered to fall into comparative neglect. Since the days of Aristotle, who has rivalled him in subtilty of invention and power of analysis? If his theory of logic, after swaying the public mind for a succession of ages, at length gave place to a more enlightened system; yet his rhetoric and poetics, as well as his politics and ethics, have lost none of their credit, but have continued to rise in the estimation of scholars. Since the time of Longinus, what writer can be said to have surpassed *him* in learned and philosophical criticism? And who, since the age of Quintilian, has treated the subjects embraced in his *Institutes* with greater soundness of judgment and purity of taste? There is not a man of the present age, however conversant with these subjects, and distinguished for general scholarship, who would not, if yet un-

acquainted with the above authors, derive much valuable instruction from the study of them.

3. In the matter of *civil history*, the productions of the ancients are to be viewed, not only as the almost exclusive, and therefore invaluable sources of information relating to the times of which they treat, but as illustrating the customs, institutions, and opinions of mankind during a long period of the progress of civil culture and of the development of national character. The great importance of the subjects embraced in so long a succession of ages, is fully equalled by the character of the writers who have treated of them. In all the traits essential to a good historian, the ancient models are, most of them, justly regarded as holding the first rank.

In a production distinguished alike for the beauty of its style, and the importance of its subject matter, the "father of profane history" has bequeathed to mankind an inestimable work, comprising the history of the greatest kingdoms and empires of the ancient world, and has handled his extensive subject with the greatest clearness, order, and dignity.

From the pen of *Thucydides* we have the annals of twenty-one years of the Peloponnesian war. The accuracy, impartiality, and fidelity of that

author, as well as the "force of imagination, vigor of language, depth of reasoning, and clearness of conception," which Cicero ascribes to him, are acknowledged and praised by critics ancient and modern. The record which he has left of one of the most interesting eras of antiquity, possesses a value and importance that can scarcely be over-rated.

For a continuation of that record, embracing the remaining history of the Peloponnesian war, we are indebted to the labours of *Xenophon*. The ornate and graceful style, the philosophic spirit, and the instructive morality which distinguish his productions, rank *him*, also, in the first class of historians. "The soldier," says Dr. Robertson, "has always admired his talents in conducting, and the scholar in describing, the *retreat of the ten thousand* ; and the philosopher and statesman have alike been delighted with his charming work denominated the *Cyropedia*."

Among the Romans, the names of *Sallust*, *Livy* and *Tacitus*, have contributed, perhaps, in an equal degree, to the beauty, dignity, and value of *their* national literature. The first named author, from his numerous and just reflections, has by some



been considered the father of philosophic history. The subjects of which he has treated form two of the most prominent topics in the history of Rome, and in his manner of treating them he has done justice to their importance. The portion of *Livy's* voluminous history, which the moderns have been so fortunate as to recover from oblivion, no less than the ably written *Annals of Tacitus*, is distinguished for purity of style, dignity of sentiment, and depth of reflection ; and derives still greater value from the important character of the times and events which it describes.

These, and other historical productions of nearly equal merit, that have survived the desolation of the middle ages, are so many monuments of the wisdom and ability of the ancients ; and, what is of more consequence, they are so many records of events and transactions, the knowledge of which can be gleaned from no other sources.

4. In *Poetry*, the works of antiquity are still pre-eminent. If it be contended by some, that the names of *Shakspeare* and *Milton*, of *Dante* and *Tasso*, and a few others, have redeemed the verse of modern times from the reproach of inferiority to the ancient standard, it may still be urged, and

cannot be denied, that the *average merit* of ancient genius excels that of any subsequent period ; that the proportion of genuine poetry to the whole mass of metrical productions, was far greater in the infancy of literature than it has ever been since. It may, however, be safely asserted, that some of the *individual poets* of antiquity are superior to any of a later age. Who has yet succeeded in bearing away from Homer the palm of invention, from Virgil the praise of judgment ? Who, if we except but a single name, can compare with an Æschylus, a Sophocles, or an Euripides, in the walks of tragic verse ? In the department of lyric poetry, the name of Horace is associated with the nearest approach to perfection ever yet made. "Of all the writers of odes, ancient or modern," says Dr. Blair, "there is none, that in point of correctness, harmony, and happy expression, can vie with Horace. He has descended from the Pindaric rapture to a more moderate degree of elevation, and joins connected thought and good sense, with the highest beauties of poetry."

5. In *Eloquence*, the ancient models are admitted to be yet unrivalled. The specimens that remain to us, judging both from their intrinsic merit, and

from the effects ascribed to them by contemporaneous history, must be allowed to possess more of the essential qualities of perfect oratory, than any subsequent productions of a similar kind. There are indeed, many illustrious names recorded in the history of modern eloquence ; many who are justly distinguished for having attained the first rank among their contemporaries ; and I would be far from denying or depreciating their merit ; yet the brightness of their fame is dimmed by the intense splendor of those greater names, those master spirits of Grecian and Roman oratory, Demosthenes and Cicero. Let him, then, who would attain to a high standard of oratorical excellence, make himself familiar with the ancient masters. This is the more necessary in these days, when public speakers have become so numerous, that a higher degree of cultivation is required to raise one above the level of mediocrity.

6. The *philosophers* of antiquity, though considered for many subsequent ages as little less than divine, and though still admitted to have been (some of them at least) men of surpassing genius, are nevertheless regarded with but little favor by the present generation. The claim which their works

possess to the merit of *practical* utility is considered extremely slight, and this deficiency is the ground of their condemnation. Yet I venture to assert that the study of the ancient philosophers, if properly engaged in, would be attended, in nearly every point of view, with decided advantage. The object proposed by those teachers of wisdom, was indeed a noble one. It was to discover truth, to ascertain and settle the distinctions between right and wrong, to elaborate from the resources of their own minds a system of ethics, to lay down principles of conduct, and trace the path of duty for their less enlightened contemporaries, and, in fine, to elevate, strengthen, and dignify the moral and intellectual character of their species. If they failed to accomplish all that they aimed at, if they were in some instances imposed upon by the semblance of truth, and embraced the shadow for the substance, yet the nature of their inquiries proves the loftiness of their purpose, and their very errors may become sources of wisdom. The history of philosophy is the history of the human understanding, and it must be in the highest degree interesting and instructive to study the workings of the mind during the earlier stages of its development, and to con-

proportion as the mass of the people in this country shall become thoroughly enlightened, as the stream of knowledge shall grow deeper, as the literary taste of the nation shall become sound and elevated, and as improved modes of mental culture shall tend more to produce the harmonizing evolution of the faculties ; in the same degree this ancient learning will be more appreciated and respected, and more thoroughly incorporated into our systems of education.











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